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The Spies Who Came From Next Door

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BONN

IT is one of the quiet, persistent anxieties of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization that its most important European member is also the most penetrated by spies from the Warsaw Pact. Lying on Europe's ideological fault line, the Federal Republic of Germany faces not only the massed divisions of the Soviet Union and its allies; in the midst of its open, pluralist society lurk the agents of a formidable espionage establishment run by Germans who happen to be Communists.

In the last two weeks, a major spy scandal has abruptly shattered the somnolent end-of-summer atmosphere in Bonn, pushing these quiet anxieties to the forefront of NATO concerns. It started in a low key with the disappearance of two secretaries and a West German army messenger, and then became dramatic and serious with the reported defection to East Berlin of Hans Joachim Tiedge, a senior counterintelligence officer in charge of catching East German spies.

Last week, a highly placed secretary in the President's office in Bonn was arrested. Two East German couples in Switzerland and Britain were also picked up. A second counterintelligence officer, Reinhard Leibetanz, was questioned about a decade-old friendship with a vanished East German agent. All were suspected of having links to the Hauptverwaltung Aufklärung or HVA, the East German intelligence agency.

The Tiedge affair was not the first spy scandal to shake Bonn. In 1954, the first head of West Germany's counterintelligence agency, Otto John, turned up in East Berlin; he returned home two years later claiming he had been kidnapped and was sentenced to four years in prison. In 1961, Heinz Felfe, director of the Federal Intelligence Service's anti-Soviet counterespionage section, was unmasked as a Soviet agent. And in 1974, Chancellor Willy Brandt was forced to resign after Günter Guillaume, a close aide, was revealed to be a Communist "mole." Over the years, many Bonn office secretaries have been discovered to be spies, often lured into their dangerous avocation by East German lover-agents.

Last week, intelligence experts and politicians were weighing the damage of the Tiedge defection and comparing it to previous losses. Some feared that the betrayal may have crippled West Germany's counterintelligence effort for years, since Mr. Tiedge, a 19-year veteran of the service, had vast, detailed knowledge and was responsible for monitoring 80 percent of Warsaw Pact espionage operations in West Germany.

These are carried out by several thousand East German agents, who blend easily into the western part of what was once a united Germany. They are commanded by an intriguing figure, Gen. Markus Johannes Wolf, the Communist world's longest-serving spymaster. The son of Friedrich Wolf, a playwright, Markus Wolf was born near Stuttgart in 1923. Ten years later, escaping the Nazis' persecution of the Jews, the family fled to Switzerland and then to the Soviet Union. A brilliant student, "Mischa" Wolf attended a Komintern school and at the war's end was placed by the Soviet authorities in a Berlin radio station, where he vigilantly watched its political line. He also covered the war crimes trial of Nazi leaders at Nuremberg. After the German Democratic Republic was founded in 1949, he briefly served as a diplomat but soon took over the Institute for Economic Research, the kernel of what became the HVA. His brother, Konrad Wolf, was a film director, president of the East German Academy of Arts and a member of the Communist Party Central Committee. Their father was Ambassador to Poland.

Like the fictional Karla in the Le Carré spy novels, General Wolf is regarded by West German intelligence operatives as a mesmerizing adversary. "He's very intelligent and is doing good work," said Richard Meier, a former head of West German counterintelligence, who only twitted "Mischa" for getting himself photographed by Swedish intelligence while on a visit to Stockholm. Beyond their fascination with General Wolf's private life, his love for hunting and reputed weakness for beautiful women, however, West German intelligence officers are concerned with the efficient methods of his spies.

Recruitment of West Germans ranges from assigning "Romeos" to court middle-aged Bonn secretaries who have access to important information, to placing seemingly harmless want ads in West Berlin papers, gradually luring university students into furnishing ever more compromising information. For converts to spying, financial gain can be a motivation, but one West German intelligence officer said that "an ambition to be someone else," to have a secret life that enlivens a drab existence, is often uppermost.

The East Germans have no trouble keeping West Germany infiltrated. Last year, 40,000 East Germans were permitted to emigrate to West Germany, and H.V.A. operatives were certainly in their midst. General Wolf's agency also confiscates the identity papers of West Germans who move to East Germany and dispatches agents bearing them to Western countries and then into the Federal Republic. The two secretaries who vanished from Bonn last month had been operating for two decades under false identities.

The Guillaume affair badly soured German-German relations, but last week, Bonn and East Berlin were conspicuously striving to prevent this from happening again. Erich Honecker, the East German party chief, told a gathering of army officers that his Government sought "mutually advantageous cooperation" with the Federal Republic. Today at the Leipzig Fair, Mr. Honecker is scheduled to meet with Franz Josef Strauss, the right-wing Bavarian Christian Democrat. Later this month, Mr. Honecker will receive Willy Brandt, the Social Democratic politician, who will be on his first visit to East Germany since the Guillaume scandal. "Espionage is a professional thing that is separate from politics," commented Mr. Meier, the former counterespionage chief, reflecting the prevailing mood in Bonn. "We spy on them and they spy on us."

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